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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 000128

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SUBJECT: NEPAL: BOUCHER URGES PROGRESS ON MAOIST COMBATANTS
WITH DEFENSE MINISTER AND ARMY CHIEF

Classified By: Ambassador Nancy J. Powell. Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

Summary

11. (C) In meetings on February 11 and February 12 with Defense Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa and Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Rookmangud Katawal, Assistant Secretary Boucher pushed for progress in completing the peace process, including the rehabilitation and integration of Maoist combatants. The Defense Minister and the Army chief requested continued assistance to the Nepal Army including arms for its peacekeepers in Africa. Septels report on the Assistant Secretary's meetings with other Government of Nepal officials and with the leaders of the Communist Party of Nepal - United Marxist Leninist and the Nepali Congress.

Defense Minister: Integration, Recruitment, Aid

12. (C) Maoist Defense Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa told Assistant Secretary Boucher on February 11 that the rehabilitation and integration process for People's Liberation Army combatants was not moving as fast as the Maoists wanted. Thapa affirmed that the Maoists would be flexible and hoped the other three parties on the Special Committee would be also. The Defense Minister also stated that the "minors" had been separated from the camps, then backtracked and said they had only been segregated in preparation for release. He claimed that the minors could be separated until rehabilitation programs were established and that currently no international organizations had plans to help with rehabilitation of those in the cantonments whom the UN Mission in Nepal had not verified as combatants (both untrue). Thapa expressed regret that the Nepal Army had not followed democratic norms in its handling of the recruitment issue. He blamed the previous (Koirala) government for not clarifying the different interpretations of the peace agreements. (Note: One view supports recruitment of soldiers to make up for attrition and retirement. The other does not. End note.) The Defense Minister asked the Assistant Secretary to help make Nepal self-sufficient. Instead of selling Nepal bullets, help Nepal manufacture its own. Finally, he hoped the United States would look favorably on the Government of Nepal's pending request for lethal and non-lethal assistance to the Army, so it could deploy on UN peacekeeping missions properly equipped.

13. (C) During a meeting with Boucher on February 12, Chief of Army Staff Rookmangud Katawal described the Nepal Army as the last obstacle to the Maoists seizing total control. He explained that the Maoists "talked sweet" -- even to him at times -- but their ultimate goal was a one-party, communist state. The Army leadership wanted to keep the pressure on the United Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) to stay in the democratic process. Katawal challenged the Maoists to prove their dedication to democracy by disbanding the Maoist Army and allowing the former combatants an individual choice about their futures. The Army Chief expressed the view that the Maoist-led government should not be toppled. Instead, the Maoists should be pressed to uphold democratic norms, disarm its Army (and the Young Communist League), enforce the law and write the new constitution. Katawal took the opportunity as well to reiterate the Army's request for the restoration of International Military and Education Training Funding, and for lethal and nonlethal support for UN peacekeeping missions.

Comment

14. (C) Assistant Secretary Boucher's February 11-12 visit to Nepal came as the Maoist Army was preparing to celebrate the 13th anniversary of the launch of the so-called "People's

KATHMANDU 00000128 002 OF 002

War." The Assistant Secretary's visit made clear that, in the U.S. view, it was time for the process of rehabilitating and integrating Maoist combatants to begin. Boucher urged all of those he met, including the Prime Minister, to start by getting the children out of the camps. Defense Minister Thapa's claim that the international organizations are not ready is disingenuous. UNICEF and its coalition of non-governmental organizations have been ready and eager to get started since 2007. The Government of Nepal seems unlikely to meet its promise from December 2008 to the UN Secretary General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict to have the minors out by the end of February deadline. However, post and other diplomatic missions here will keep the pressure up. The good news is that after months of delay the Special Committee is up and running, and we are hopeful that it will start to formulate the guidelines for the general rehabilitation and integration process that have so far been lacking.

15. (U) Assistant Secretary Boucher has cleared this cable.
POWELL